



Strengthening Advocacy, Communication and Brand Recognition through Social Media in West Africa

Supported by The East-East Partnership Beyond Borders



OSIWA



MEETING REPORT

Two-day conference on:

STRENGTHENING ADVOCACY, COMMUNICATION AND BRAND RECOGNITION THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA IN WEST AFRICA

Supported by The East-East Partnership Beyond Borders

DATE: November 28 & 29, 2012

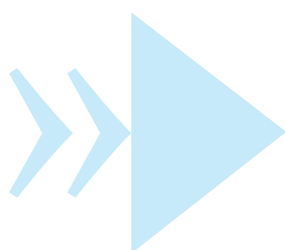
VENUE: WACSI Secretariat, East-Legon, Accra Ghana



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Executive Summary



Social media provides the public a space to promote discourse on issues facing society. This space has become a veritable avenue for civil society organisations (CSOs) to expand their networks and widen participation in their causes. A number of CSOs in the region have used social media effectively to strengthen their communication and outreach strategies.

Social media provides the voiceless with a voice, and greatly influences the power dynamics within society. The ease and accessibility of these tools ensures that those who would previously have little opportunity to convene and discuss their views now find it possible to do so. It is within the framework of these exciting developments that the West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI), supported by the East-East Partnership beyond Borders and the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), organised an experts conference for established social media activists from Africa, United States of America and Europe to deliberate on the opportunities and prospects for the utilization of social media for brand recognition, communication and advocacy purposes.

This meeting brought together Thirty-One (31) social media experts comprising civil society practitioners from Europe, East, Central and West Africa, to deliberate on the best ways of using social media as a tool for advocacy, communication and brand recognition.

Other issues discussed included the value of social media tools and techniques, how to increase the knowledge and skills of CSOs on the use of social media and strategies through which CSOs can leverage on this platform to promote different development agenda.

The key recommendations that emanated from the discussions and deliberations at the experts' meeting included the following:

Civil Society and Social Media

- » Encourage more CSOs to utilize social media platforms to communicate their values and engagement;
- » Promote the effective and consistent use of social media tools within CSOs;
- » Integrate social media into broader communication and information dissemination strategies of CSOs;
- » Encourage CSOs to utilize social media tools that work for them;
- » Ensure that information articulated on social media platforms are credible and evidence-based;
- » Embolden CSOs to apply an effective combination of social media and traditional media tools to promote their work;
- » Encourage CSOs to use pop culture to engage “social” users, politically; and
- » Senior management of CSOs should lead the promotion and institutionalization of social media within their organisations.

Civil Society and Google online platforms

- » Promote awareness about ‘Google plus’ applications within civil society in West Africa;
- » Create a framework that will help train civil society practitioners on the different Google platforms that could be beneficial to them; and
- » Utilize the convening ability of Google platforms, for example, Google hang-outs to organize online forums and discussions on various social issues.

Communication and Information Dissemination

- » Develop training programs to help CSOs communicate and amplify their messages on social media platforms;
- » Design press releases with engaging messages that leverage on social media communication channels; and

- » Promote the use of social media tools to provide an avenue for CSOs to share experiences and exchange technical expertise.

Online Fundraising

- » Promote crowd funding which enables CSOs to stay connected to local banks to receive donations.

Influencing Policy Change

- » Ensure that information disseminated to influence government policies must be clearly articulated; and
- » Encourage synergy with other activists in the digital world to enhance the amplification of online advocacy campaigns.

Brand Recognition

- » Promote the importance of brand recognition for CSOs to foster institutional strengthening and sustainability.
- » Develop an engaging and interactive social media and brand strategy that connects and responds to a targeted audience;
- » Strengthen the brand of CSOs by incorporating the values of differentiation, credibility and authenticity through social media; and
- » CSOs should be encouraged to focus on being an authority in their own fields of intervention by utilising local solutions that have global appeal.

Documentation

- » Encourage CSOs to consistently measure, document and share their experiences using social media; and
- » Conduct research to explore the extent to which civil society is using social media to achieve their goals.

Global and regional visibility

- » West African CSOs need to participate and be visible in regional and global social media spaces.



1.0 INTRODUCTION



WACSI, supported by the East-East Partnership beyond Borders of the Open Society Institute and OSIWA convened a consultative meeting of social media experts from **November 28 to 29, 2012**, at the WACSI Secretariat, Accra, Ghana.

The meeting brought together thirty-one (31) experts from Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, Kenya, Senegal, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, United States of America, Holland and Germany to deliberate on how social media can be used as a tool for advocacy, communication and brand recognition by CSOs. The Institute mobilised African and international experts within a seminar setting to explore contemporary channels and methodologies through which civil society can effectively utilize new media to promote development agenda.

In addition, WACSI utilized the platform to gather relevant information that would guide the Institute to develop a skills enhancement programme for CSOs to be able to develop and implement a robust social media strategy and to provide capacity development initiatives for CSOs in the region.

Meeting Objectives

The objectives of the experts' meeting were to:

- » Demonstrate the value of social media tools and techniques;
- » Increase the knowledge and skills of usage of social media for brand recognition, communication and advocacy purposes;
- » Create the platform for sharing ideas on how to apply social media techniques to strengthen institutional and programmatic delivery; and
- » Map out strategies through which civil society organisations can leverage on social media to promote different development agenda

Opening Remarks

Nana Afadzinu, Executive Director, WACSI: Nana Afadzinu welcomed the participants and commended them for honouring the invitation to take part in the meeting.

She stated that the concept and establishment of WACSI was initiated by the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), to develop the institutional and operational capacity of civil society organisations in West Africa through three main strategic areas; training, research and policy advocacy.

As a capacity building Institute, WACSI empowers CSOs through specially designed programmes informed by the needs of civil society in West Africa. These needs are identified through rigorous research conducted by the Institute to explore the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for civil society in West Africa. The Institute creates the space for civil society to brainstorm and make feasible recommendations aimed at addressing key policy issues and development challenges affecting civil society and development in West Africa. These programmes create an avenue for civil society practitioners to acquire knowledge and skills and develop partnerships that will enable them to contribute to good governance, promote open democracies, and enable their organisations to be robust, credible and sustainable structures.

WACSI convened the Social Media Conference under its policy advocacy programmatic mandate; to enable social media experts across the globe reflect on how civil society is using social media tools, and how CSOs can leverage on these tools to promote citizens engagement and deepen transparency and accountability of governments to its citizens.

She indicated that this conference creates an avenue for experts to share their perspectives on the effective use of social media and to deepen understanding on the best approaches to engage using new media that CSOs can adopt to strategically and effectively utilize social media tools to enhance their efficiency. She hoped this conference would produce innovative recommendations that could be implemented to help CSOs understand and effectively apply various social media tools and techniques for brand recognition, communication and advocacy.



She interrogated the extent to which social media is used in West Africa and the world and posed the following questions to shape the thinking and discussions of the meeting;

- » Is social media being used effectively?
- » Is it being over hyped or it is being used judiciously to raise awareness and promote citizens engagement in democratic and governance processes?
- » Has social media been used exhaustively during electoral processes within West Africa given the growing internet and mobile phone penetration in the region? Ghana, she mentioned, has over 80% mobile penetration.
- » Has the use of social media added value in the promotion of democracy and good governance in Africa?
- » What challenges exist with the use of social media by West Africans and the continent broadly?
- » Should civil society advocacy be focusing their attention on addressing policy and regulation issues related to internet penetration, access and use by West Africans?
- » Are there aspects of social media that civil society can use to enhance the performance of CSOs which can translate to the building of stronger social movements?



2.0 PRESENTATION SESSIONS

2.1 Social Media: Prospects and challenges (Adaora Ijeoma Asala –Spectra, New Media Consultant)

Session Objective: *The goal of this session was to set the pace for discussions for the two day meeting. It served as an avenue to initiate participants to brainstorm, reflect and discuss on their understanding of what social media is, how it is being used, the advantages, challenges and possible risks encountered in using social media within their respective spheres.*

The presenter dubbed her presentation ‘Advocacy 2.0: Progress and Pitfalls of Social Media’. Spectra, a Nigerian LGBT and media activist, writer and new media consultant based in the USA gave an overview of social media in Africa, she shared her perspectives on Africans for Africa New Media Project, the challenges, pitfalls and insights on social media in the continent.

Africa’s social media landscape: The presenter noted that by 2016, it is estimated that there will be one billion mobile phones in Africa. Despite the growth in mobile phone use on the continent, the most active social media users are from South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria, Egypt and Morocco. Africans actively engage on social media platforms using mobile phones. Characteristic evidence is depicted by tweeter users on the continent. Spectra pointed out that 57% of tweets from Africa are sent from mobile devices. She explained that majority of tweeter users in Africa are youth aged between 20 and 29 who make up 60% of tweeters on the continent.

Africans, more than western countries, do not primarily use the web for accessing information. Rather, they utilize it for entertainment purposes. To buttress this point, Spectra pointed out that twitter in Africa is widely used for social conversations and 80% of twitter users in Africa say it is for communicating with friends.

Spectra used practical instances to illustrate how social media has made significant contributions to social change in contemporary society. These include:

- i. **Mobile Health:** The presenter explained how Medic Mobile uses communication technologies to improve the health of underserved and disconnected communities. The SMS-based platform allows patients to get home-based care even if they cannot be visited by the care giver.
- ii. **Influencing governments via twitter:** Spectra explained that online social movements mainly via twitter have forced African governments engage with their citizens and better monitor governance processes. Mainly using twitter, large numbers of social media users have strategically networked and raised awareness on critical issues that need a redress by government. This has led to conflicts being organised, propagated and coordinated via social media. Examples of twitter-led campaigns include #ArabSpring, #SudanRevolts, #GhanaElections, #OccupyNigeria, etc.
- iii. **Human Rights Monitoring:** The presenter explained that Ushahidi, a non-profit tech company that specialises in developing free and open source software for information collection, visualisation and interactive mapping in real time has effectively used social media tools to combat violence against women, monitor human rights trafficking and monitor electoral processes.
- iv. **Media and pop culture:** The new media consultant explained that entertainment professionals and pop culture has a lot of power and a high level of influence on their followers via their highly patronised social media channels. She noted that from personal stories to political campaigns, the signal-boosting power of social media makes the average citizen a potential thought leader.

Social media has facilitated the access to information by its users. Social media users have access to information faster. It makes access to less in-depth information easier. It takes cognisance of the fact that people have short attention spans (humans have a 2 minutes attention span when online) and creates platforms through which information can be shared in a sensational and ‘eye-catching’ manner.

Despite the significant strides new media has made so far, Spectra noted that it is still being dominated by whites, males, western users.

The presenter put forward some insights based on her experience as a new media trainer which could be leveraged upon to enable social media users within civil society to effectively and strategically use the available tools and space.

She remarked that ICT trainings often focus more on the 'what'. It is important to focus on the 'why' and 'how'. Enabling civil society practitioners who use new media tools for their work to understand how to generate content for new media platforms and the relevance of the message will enable them to better engage with their target audience.

She equally pointed out that it is vital for social media campaigns to be led by credible messengers. Focus should not be made on the message or issue only. There is need to honour the storyteller rather than the story only.

Discussions:

Participants commended the presentation, its uniqueness and the nature of work carried out by Spectra. A participant emphasised on the need for the amplification of the voices using social media. He laid emphasis on the need for the communicator to build confidence in his audience as a means of deepening their advocacy engagement. Amplification of the voices is boosted by the numbers engaged in the campaign and lends more credibility to the campaign.

It was discussed that social media is a growing platform for entertainment in Africa. Lessons were drawn from the case of Enough is Enough Nigeria, which worked with Nigerian celebrities on the RSVP (Register, Select, Vote, Protect) project. The project aimed at encouraging Nigerians to register and vote in the 2011 presidential elections. Conclusions reached at emphasised on the necessity for social media users on the continent to realise that entertainment is an African reality which could be leveraged upon to promote different development issues in Africa.

2.2 Strengthening civil society and fostering development through Google online platforms (Estelle Akofio-Sowah, Country Manager, Google Ghana)

Session Objective: *The goal of this session was to deepen participants' understanding of how Google has succeeded in effectively introducing organisations to social media platforms and how these organisations have been able to embrace this new mode of communication and incorporated them within their communications framework. The presentation expounded on the social media platforms which Google Ghana has introduced to organisations over the years, how these platforms were welcomed by the institutions/organisations and how the organisations have been able to enhance their organisational communication by leveraging on google online services.*

The Presenter commenced with the mission and strategy of Google in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Google's mission is to organise the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful. She further stated that Google's strategy is to get more users online by developing an accessible, relevant and sustainable internet ecosystem. Google intends to do this by reducing access as a barrier to all users, making the internet relevant and useful to Africans, and helping to build an internet ecosystem in Africa that is viable and sustainable.

This presentation focused on how civil society, media organisations and political parties utilise Google online platforms to promote citizens engagement in electoral discourse and processes in the build-up to the presidential elections in Ghana. It highlighted how different constituencies make use of Google plus, YouTube and other Google online applications like Google Hangouts. Prominent among CSOs in Ghana that utilise Google's social media platforms include WACSI, Wishes Alliances, Centre for Democratic Development. Citi FM stood out as the media organisation that has effectively incorporated Google's online tools to expand its social media reach.

Given the race for the presidency and parliamentary seats in the country, the presenter noted that the main political parties in the country scrambled for votes using social

media platforms. Prominent political parties with a strong online presence include the Progressive People's Party (PPP), the National Patriotic Party (NPP), the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the Convention People's Party (CPP). These political parties made extensive use

of the Facebook platform. Party representatives engaged with Ghanaians using Google Hangout. They conducted and uploaded awareness raising campaigns on YouTube, and shared their campaign messages on the Google plus platform.

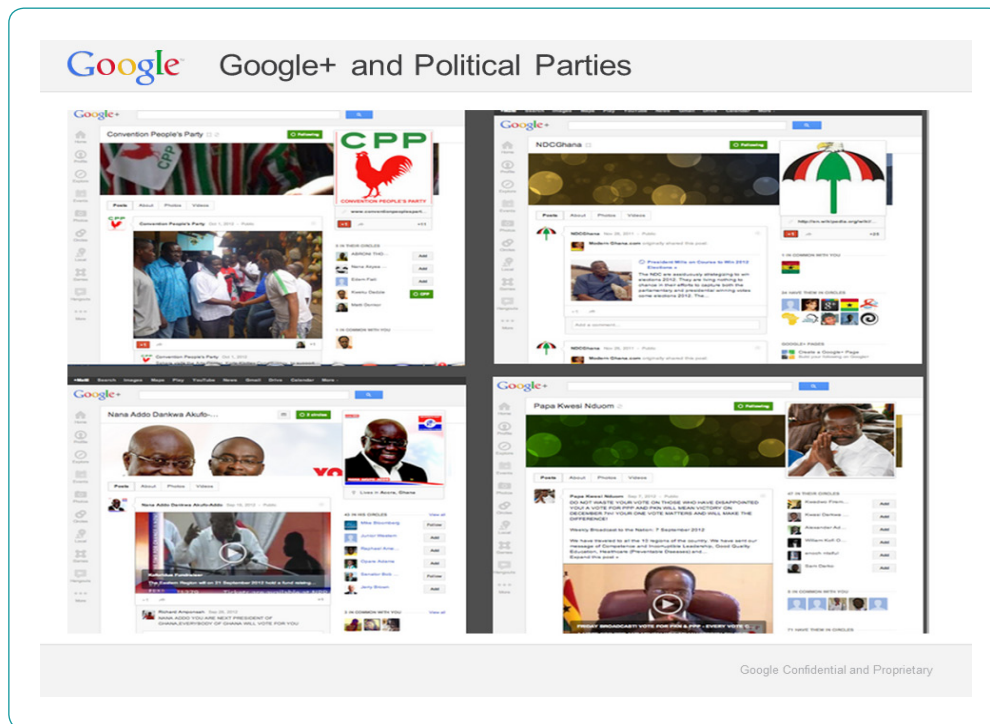


Image 1: Political parties in Ghana on Google plus (Source: Estelle Akofio-Sowah, Country Manager, Google Ghana: November 2012)

Ghana Decides Project and Google Online platforms:
The Ghana Decides Project has benefited enormously from Google online platforms alongside other social media platforms. It has made extensive use of Google hangouts to engage citizens in debates and discussions centred on

the Ghana 2012 elections. Google Hangouts enable up to 10 discussants to engage in a discussion at the same time. It allows the discussion to be recorded and broadcast instantly on a YouTube channel.

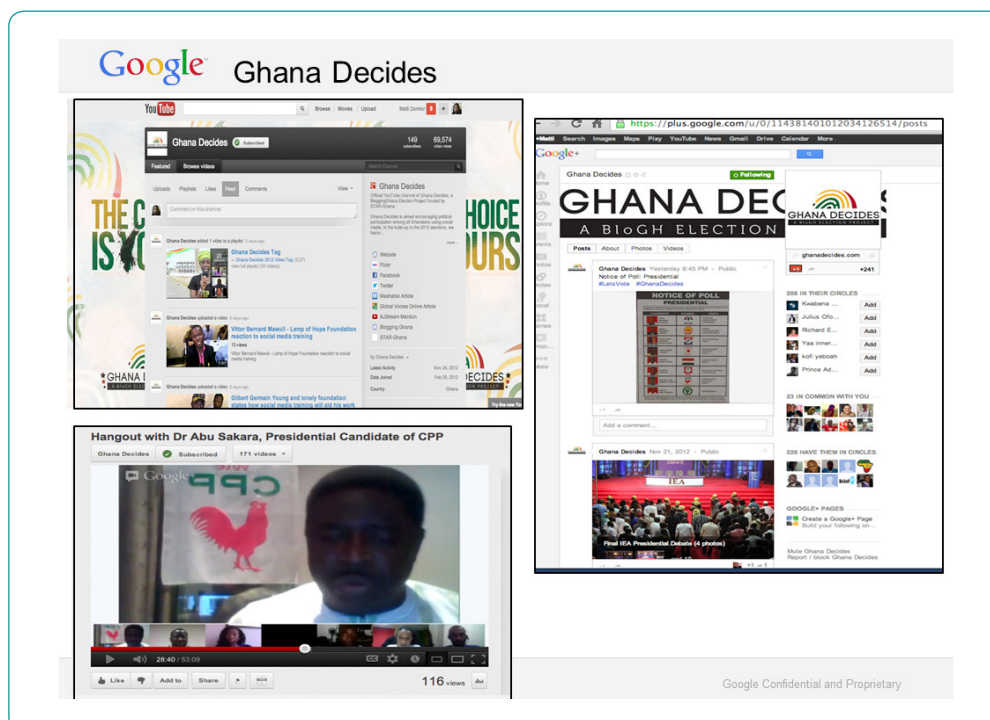


Image 2: Use of Google online platforms to promote citizens engagement in the electoral process in Ghana. (Source: Estelle Akofio-Sowah, Country Manager, Google Ghana: November 2012)

Broadcasting The IEA Debate Online: The 2012 Presidential Debates was organised to provide a forum for Presidential candidates whose parties have representation in parliament to come together to discuss and be challenged on their visions, policies and programmes. This is to enable the electorate make an informed choice. The Debates seek to introduce an issues-driven approach and dimension to the Presidential campaign.

Google Ghana supported Multimedia group, Joy FM, to broadcast the IEA debates online as they unfolded. This was done to convey the debates to viewers via social media alongside traditional media. This enabled the public to have footage of the political promises of party candidates which can be used to promote accountability of leaders.

The 'My Voice' Project and Google online services:

A group of students in Ghana are promoting citizens engagement of young Ghanaians in governance and electoral processes through the 'My Voice' project. The campaign seeks to get the voice/views/ perspectives of individuals (students, lecturers, administrators, etc) on various university campuses as to what they expect from the government especially during the election period. They upload the feedback videos to the YouTube channel of Google Ghana.

Training for the Media and Civil Society: The Google Ghana office undertook the responsibility of training media houses and CSOs on how to mainstream Google online applications into their social media strategies. The training treated issues on Google Alerts, Google Moderator, Google Plus and YouTube. Media houses were provided with skills on how to collect news information using on-the-spot video recording using Google Hangouts and directly uploading unto their YouTube channels for their target audience. The training equally equipped staff of media houses (mainly radio stations) to record and share live programmes online using Google Hangouts.

Some CSOs were introduced to social media platforms on Google and equipped with skills to manage these platforms to effectively communicate their core messages in an effective manner. A beneficiary of this training is WACSI. The presentation stressed on the necessity for organisations to deepen their commitment, invest in training and development in the area of social media. It emphasised on the need for CSOs to utilise proactive approaches in the use of social media.

Google Elections hub: Google Ghana has created an online platform which summarizes all online information related to the Ghana 2012 elections. It comprises summary of all information on the internet. It compiles news feeds from news partners, information on political parties and candidates related to elections in Ghana.

The presentation highlighted on the following tips for CSOs to deepen their social media engagement;

- » High level commitment and engagement on the use of online tools;
- » Get all staff to be involved in the online engagement process;
- » Train more personnel on how to manage online platforms;
- » Planning ahead and promote events online to raise awareness;
- » Promote events on issues on all existing platforms;
- » Partner with other networks and organisations;
- » Invest in the internet to have a good bandwidth; and
- » Generate revenue using online platforms

Discussions:

A participant sought to know the challenges encountered by Google Ghana in their efforts to promote understanding and use of their social media platforms by the media and CSOs.

Estelle enumerated the following as some of the challenges encountered:

- » Poor internet connectivity;
- » Limited resources by some partners to fully implement social media strategy; and
- » Lack of practice of collecting information on the amount of traffic generated on social media and other online platforms such as their websites.

Ensuing discussions stressed the need for organisations to utilise social media based on need and the strength of their organisation. That is, CSOs do not need to over-stretch their resources in their efforts to exploit several social media channels. CSOs were entreated to focus on using two or three social media platforms that would enable them to effectively reach out to their target audience while achieving the goals of the organisation or the campaign.

2.3 Communicating civil society values and achievements using social media (Anne Mazimhaka, Illume)

Session Objective: *The goal of this session was to highlight on the most appropriate ways by which civil society can leverage on social media platforms to effectively communicate their core values in an innovative way, to raise awareness and deepen understanding on their programmes, and to effectively communicate their success stories to wider audiences.*

Civil society and social media: The presentation commenced with a focus on the relevance of social media on civil society. It stressed on the usefulness of social media in shaping the image of the organisation by helping in providing a clear understanding of who the organisation is, how people can get involved in the work of the organisation and what the organisation does and why.

Social media can be used to communicate an organisation's core values in an innovative manner. It can be used to make an audience or stakeholders know how to become involved in the efforts of an organisation and spread its message. Social media is vital in raising awareness and deepening understanding of an organisation's programmes and campaigns. It can provide strategic tools to effectively communicate an organisation's success stories to a wide audience.

Social networking and online activism: Social networking can be defined as the process of building and expanding your contacts and through a web of connections (Mazimhaka, 2012). This has been facilitated by the existence of the internet. The internet has provided new opportunities to connect with a wider audience. It has made communication possible between targets in an immediate, local and international network.

Why use social networking tools for your organisation and/or campaign? Social networking tools provide opportunities for advocates and organisations to engage in successful social campaigns. Three main reasons were shared to account for the relevance of social networking tools in any campaign.

- i. Social networking tools **broaden the reach of your organization/campaign**. They allow you to contact audiences and partners that are beyond your current reach. They help in identifying and locating other people or groups in these social networking

platforms that might be able to support your campaign.

- ii. Social networking tools provide platforms for **publicizing issues/campaigns**. This is made possible because social networking allows for easy sharing of information between different social networking sites. With social networking tools, a campaign can exist in various spaces online at the same time. For example, you can have a Twitter account for your campaign, a blog and a Facebook page, and share information from one space to the other automatically.
- iii. Social networking provides a **cost-efficient way of communicating** for organisations with a minimal communications budget. It might be more efficient to create a free blog to serve for a website for an organisation than to build a website. From the human resource perspective, it may take fewer people to run social networking spaces than to manage an organizational website.

Online Campaigns: CSO activities are usually grounded in intensive and exhaustive content that expound on the issues or campaign. It is important for organisations to have a main space on which this information is stored and shared with its target audience. Given the nature of the issue or campaign being addressed, it is important to identify the relevant tools that would strategically add value to an online campaign. Tools used for a campaign should effectively communicate relevant information to specific target audiences as per the purpose of the campaign.

Planning an online campaign: Every online campaign should be treated with focus and direction as any other typical campaign. It requires a strategic communication plan to ensure success. The communication plan should clearly articulate the following:

- » The goal of the campaign;
- » The campaign messages;
- » The campaign tactics or strategy;
- » The communication channels and tools; and
- » The target audience for the campaign; the purpose for reaching this audience, the degree of power and influence they possess are key components to collect evidence on while executing the campaign strategy.



Image 3: Components of an online campaign strategy (Source: Anne Mazimhaka, Illume, November 2012)

Online campaigns should make use of communication plans because they will;

- » Guide how the campaign will be implemented;
- » Facilitate performance **tracking**;
- » Provide an opportunity to **make changes** to your campaign; and
- » Provide a picture of the **different** ways or tools to communicate your campaign.

Selecting social media tools: In selecting the forms or channels to communicate campaign messages, it is important to seek answers to the following questions:

- » What tools/channels are accessible and available to **you and your allies**?
- » What tools/channels will reach the **priority/target audiences**?
- » What tools/channels will **widen the reach** of the campaign?

Tips for choosing social media tools

- » **Step1:** Consider how the functions of social networking tools can work for your needs.
- » **Step 2:** Go back to the plan. The campaign plan serves as a suitable guide in choosing the tool(s).
- » **Step 3:** Develop content for the campaign.
- » **Step 4:** Locate target and allies.

CSOs and social media: Existing opportunities and challenges

Opportunities: Social media provides countless opportunities for civil society. Some of these include;

- » **Networking:** Effective use of social media tools lead to the establishment of relationships between the CSO and individuals within their network;
- » **Storytelling:** The use of social media tools can broaden the reach of a civil society organization's online presence as well as establish and strengthen the CSO's network; and
- » **Engagement and action:** An organisation that integrates social media allows individuals to engage with the organization by performing a small act: 'liking' and sharing content.

Challenges:

- » Turning online support into real action one of the biggest challenges in online campaigning is ensuring that online activities have impact on the ground;
- » Loss of control over your content because social networking makes it easy for people to comment on your information, tag it and share it with their own networks, you cannot be assured that the content you publish on these sites will be represented according to your design. Misrepresentation of your campaign is always a drawback in campaigning through social networking platforms, especially if you have no full control over its content;

- » Inconsistent messaging if social media marketing/campaigning is not carried out strategically, representatives of the same organization could be sending out inconsistent or contradictory messages;
- » Decreased security one of the dangers of using online spaces is that it gives people a false sense of security. Many believe that just because you are running an online campaign you can be less careful about what you publish. In fact, risks to your campaign can be enhanced in online campaigning because you will have very little control over who can see your campaign and where your campaign messages will be published; and
- » Competition other campaigns are also using social networking to reach a broader audience. This means that your campaign will be competing with other campaigns for support. This means that you will have to commit to maintaining your social networking spaces as long as your campaign goals and objectives allow you to.

Addressing the challenges

- » Civil society must always include communications as part of its strategy and bear it in mind from the start of activity planning;
- » Communication policies should not be the sole responsibility of civil society's press or communication officers but should include the participation of all its members and mainly its leaders;
- » Civil society's main actors must clearly know how to act, which messages to convey and how to make them coincide with their colleagues' similar views. The dispersion of strengths and messages should be avoided. If messages point in different directions, collective impact levels are reduced;
- » The traditional tool of press releases has little impact if these are more focused on promoting the "brand", i.e. the specific NGO, than the theme and the actions of the organization. Press releases and corresponding social media messages should focus on issues in order to be more engaging; and
- » Training is becoming more important each day. Civil society leaders should be better prepared in the field of communications to get their message through.

Discussions:

A participant sought to know how best to craft advocacy messages in a society where civil society is perceived as an opposing entity. And thus, what can civil society do when government regulates internet use by citizens.

It was recommended that CSOs should form alliances and engage with allies and stakeholders interested in the issue under question. With social media, despite censorship, advocates remain connected to their audience and stakeholders worldwide and can continue to share ideas aimed at influencing policy change. And in sharing information, organisations or advocates should concentrate on disseminating information that relates to the organisation's or advocacy objectives.

Secondly, participants quizzed to know which social media tools are most relevant and would be most effective in promoting the work of civil society in SSA. It was strongly recommended that the choice of social media tools should be made based on the context, the audience and accessibility to the tools by the user and his/her target audience. For Africa for example, online platforms such as Facebook and Twitter would create a vibrant connecting platform to advocate for issues.

2.4 Influencing effective policy change through digital activism (Joshua Japheth Omojuwa)

Session Objective: *The goal of this session was to discuss the relevance of social media within the policy influencing process and to identify the most appropriate ways by which civil society can leverage on social media platforms to influence decisions to institute and implement policies.*

Digital Activism is activism powered by new tools, new ideas and new strategies engaging what used to work in the process of evolving new ways of making change happen. Effective Policy change can only be defined in results. Policies are what define the path of governments. No matter what a government says, policy implementation is what it does that matters. If CSOs and online activists cannot affect or entirely change government policies, activism would be nothing more than wasted efforts.

The presentation addressed key notions related to online activism and their practical relevance.

Activism 3.0: Activism, Re-activism and the necessary new order: Activism would be outstanding if CSOs and activists had the opportunity to offer practical options and alternatives. In reality, most people who think they are activists are in the logical definition of their actions, Re-activists. They are naturally wired to react most times after the effect.

Activism works! It has contributed to improve lives. It must be strategic. Activists by themselves must demonstrate competence and must always focus on achieving the goal of the campaign which targets results and people. Beyond being activists, it is strategically advantageous to be **Pro-activists**.

In practical reality, the presenter defined pro-active to be pro-reactive i.e. acting in anticipation of future problems, needs or changes. Pro-activism is a reaction but it is a reaction to what is yet to happen. Pro-activism is about bringing impending realities to the fore and proffering ideas on what the government could do to avoid economic, political and social failures.

The presentation emphasized on the necessity for activists to **focus on issues**. For activists to effectively affect government policy, they must set a goal, define it in clear terms, set out the necessary steps and take action to achieve the goal. The internet is a cluster of distractions and, only purposeful users can maximize its existence and relevance for advocacy. When an advocacy campaign gains traction, it goes beyond the advocate because then other people take it on like theirs and you are on your way to making change happen.

The presenter highlighted on the **power of synergy and amplification**. He encouraged activists to see themselves as one people in the quest for a better world. He pointed out that whatever affects Nigeria negatively will have a bearing on Ghana and in many cases that bearing is not what Ghana would like to be burdened by. Thus, he called on activists to work as a team to drive an agenda aimed at achieving a goal. Drawing lessons from the Occupy Nigeria movement, the presentation earmarked the unity exhibited by online activists who worked with journalists and activists from other continents and countries. The Nigerian government and policy makers heeded to the requests of Nigerians as online activists from Greece, Sweden, Brazil, South Africa, Finland, Belgium, etc, joined in the campaign and amplified the voices of Nigerians during the campaign.

To conclude, the presentation reiterated the power of the digital space and pointed to it as the power of the people. Digital Activism must speak a better language than noise, and CSOs and advocates need to speak in terms of policies and alternatives to influence the change of unwanted policies and practices.

2.5 Strengthening Brand Recognition through Social Media (Zawadi Nyongo)

Session objective: *The goal of this session was to identify and expatiate on the most appropriate ways through which civil society can leverage on social media platforms to effectively communicate their uniqueness and core values in an innovative and engaging way. It sought to explore avenues through which CSOs can incorporate social media platforms to raise awareness and deepen understanding on their programmes and to effectively communicate their success stories to their target audience.*

Social media branding is about connecting to and with people. People relate to people not companies¹. The presentation stressed on the need to think about an organisation's social media brand as a person. To do this, it is important to take the following questions into consideration;

- » What is your personality?
- » What are your values? What do you stand for?
- » Who do you "hang out" with & why?
- » What and who do you care about?
- » Why would anyone want to socialize with you?
- » Would you follow/like you if you weren't you?

A brand is not a trademark, a mission statement, a logo or slogan, a product or service nor advertising. Rather, a brand can be regarded as a strategic point of view, a customer value, a competitive advantage, being alive or a logic and emotion.

The following were earmarked to account for the importance of brand recognition;

- » **Communicating** the mission & values of the organization;
- » **Fundraising**;
- » **Positioning** as an expert/authority;
- » **Movement building**;
- » **Building trust** amongst stakeholders (constituents, donors, partners, etc.);
- » Establishing **partnerships**;
- » **Gaining access** to strategic spaces; and

¹ By Tony Hsieh, CEO, Zappos, <http://www.slideshare.net/vietlongplaza/social-media-strategies-instead-of-tools> (Quoted by Nyongo November 2012)



» **Institutional strengthening and sustainability** (systems, human resources, etc.).

As stated by Ingrid Srinath, Secretary General of CIVICUS, World Alliance for Citizen Participation, “You are a brand whether you like it or not....you’re going to leave some impression in a person’s mind [and] it’s your choice whether you want to actively manage that impression or whether you want them to come to their own conclusions of what they think about you. It doesn’t matter whether you’re a one person advocacy organization or a transnational INGO.”²

Characteristics for a strong brand were identified to include the following;

- » **Differentiation:** You stand out and people can easily remember what you are about. This pertains to the uniqueness of any organisation. It is important to identify the unique place of your organisation in society and capitalize on this to sell the image of the organisation;
- » **Credibility:** It is important for organisations work strategically towards achieving the goals of their organisation. Organisations should build on an area of expertise and stand out as an authority in that area and be able to proof to people that you will deliver on your promises. This will win trust for your organisation (brand); and
- » **Authenticity:** Keep your organisation’s motive and messages real, making it easier for people to identify and care about your cause.

² Source: <http://www.forbes.com/sites/rahimkanani/2012/03/01/branding-for-nonprofits-new-research-new-insights/> (Quoted by Nyongo, November 2012)

According to Nathalie Kylander (Harvard University Hauser Center for Non-Profit Organizations Fellow), “What makes a brand strong though is the close alignment between internal brand identity and external brand image, what we call brand Integrity.”³ The presentation emphasized the need for organisations to seek answers to the question: ‘who is responsible for your organisations’ brand/branding?’ This brings to fore the notion of brand democracy as a pre-requisite for an effective brand management. *Brand democracy* means that the organization trusts its members, staff, participants, and volunteers to communicate their own understanding of the organization’s core identity. And, as Alexis Ettinger, Head of Strategy and Marketing at the University of Oxford’s Skoll Centre for Social Entrepreneurship, points out, “Given the rise of social media it would be insane to try to single-handedly control the brand.”⁴

Questions for reflection and action:

- i. What methods do you currently use to strengthen your organization’s brand?
- ii. Does your organization have a social media strategy?
- iii. If yes, who is responsible for implementing your organization’s social media strategy?
- iv. If not, who generates the content for, and who manages your organization’s social media?

³ Source: <http://www.forbes.com/sites/rahimkanani/2012/03/01/branding-for-nonprofits-new-research-new-insights/> (Quoted by Nyongo, November 2012)

⁴ Source: http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/the_role_of_brand_in_the_nonprofit_sector (Quoted by Nyongo, November 2012)

- v. What challenges have you faced using social media to strengthen your organization's brand recognition?

CSOs engage into social media without a plan of action. They do not scan the tools or their audience to understand the relevance or need. They do not question the *raison d'être* for using, Twitter, Facebook or YouTube. Rather they turn to use the tools 'blindly'. There is a need for a shift in social media action. Organisations should think strategy instead of tools.

Way Forward: The following guidelines can help to shape future engagements on social media by CSOs.

- » Develop a social media strategy, implement, learn, re-strategize;
- » Be Relevant and Timely;
- » Be Dynamic (Language, Audio, Visual);
- » Engage Your Stakeholders;
- » Be Consistent (Even when using different tools);
- » Be the Authority in Your Field;
- » Build a network of brand ambassadors – you can't do it ALONE!
- » Share and Celebrate Your Successes;
- » Experiment and Be willing to take risks; and
- » Seek new ideas and innovative ways of staying relevant.

It is important to measure the strength of your brand on social media. This can be ascertained by the level of engagement on social media platforms, ability to shape and drive conversations, and the extent of the organisation's social media influence. This could galvanise an organisation's ability to realize greater achievements through social media.

For social media to serve as a relevant tool to enable CSOs prevail in their course:

- » CSOs need to consistently measure, document and share their experiences using social media as an African NGO;
- » There is an urgent need for more research on how African CSOs are using social media – We need DATA!
- » African CSOs need to participate and be VISIBLE in regional, global social media and tech spaces – e.g. **#SMWLagos**, **#SXSW**, **#SGSglobal**, **#BlogHer**, **#TakeBackTheTech**, others?
- » Social media is fast-growing. Stay updated and choose relevant tools e.g. Pinterest; and
- » CSOs and their stakeholders need to empower each other – STRENGTH IN NUMBERS!

2.6 Strategic Communication using Facebook (Kwabena Poku and Omar Farouk)

Session Objective: *This session sought to empower participants with an understanding of how to effectively use facebook to sell the brands they represent.*

As Facebook marketing continues to mature, brands and agencies are asking smarter questions concerning posting strategies. Analysis is a critical part of being able to solidify those strategies. Instead of implementing a one-size-fits-all approach, marketers are reorganizing internal teams and social strategies to better meet overall organisational objectives.

Don't Sleep during Weekends: There is a tremendous opportunity for brands to increase interaction by posting more on weekends. The interaction rate for posts on weekends is 14.5% higher compared to weekday posts, however only 14% of posts are published on Saturdays and Sundays. Facebook fans like to use the social network when they have downtime, which is why the weekends tend to receive such high interaction rates. While Monday and Tuesday receive decent interaction rates, brands should avoid Wednesdays, when interactions is 7.4% below average.

Facebook Interaction is Nocturnal, Post During "Non-Busy Hours": Brand posts published between 8 PM and 7 AM, which are defined as "non-busy hours," receive 14% higher interaction than those that post between 8 AM and 7 PM, which are defined as "busy hours." There is plenty of room for brands to improve on this, as only 18% of posts are sent during "non-busy hours." When not at work, people are more likely to spend time perusing Facebook and interacting with Page content. Providing the right content at the right time to people is a huge step in the optimization of Facebook marketing, so don't overwhelm fans when they are busy. By posting early in the morning you also allow your post to increase its News Feed Optimization during a less noisy time.

Post 1-2 Times per Day, Don't Exceed 7 Times per Week: Brands that post one or two times per day see 19% higher interaction rates than those who post three or more times per day. The key is not to bombard fans with too many posts, as Facebook News Feed Optimization often penalizes for this. Additionally, interaction rates are high among brands that post seven or less times during the week. Pages that post more than seven times per week

see a 25% decrease in interaction rates. The key here is to analyze your Page's historical performance, identify when your fans engage the most, and then post more frequently on those days (and less on the others).

What to post: Keep Posts Under the 80-Character Brick Wall. Keep it short. Posts with more than 80 characters wreck interactions. It's all about brevity on Facebook (even more so than Twitter2). Posts with 80 characters or less receive 23% higher interaction than longer posts. The problem for brands, however is that more than 75% of posts are beyond this optimum length, thus impacting interaction. So take time to figure out how to make posts concise, and reap the benefits of increased interaction.

Thinking about attachments? Use photos first: When it comes to attachment types on Facebook, photos definitely take the gold medal. This is most likely the result of the new timeline design, which allows brands to display big, beautiful images on their Pages. Photo posts receive interaction rates 39% higher than average. Meanwhile, status updates that contain only texts still receive notable interaction rates 12% higher than average. Meanwhile, posts with links or videos drive fewer likes, comments and shares than average.

Content Analysis – Generating Comments: Want Comments? Ask a Question. Question posts are popular; in fact, 29% of all posts contain a question. Though posts containing questions receive slightly lower interaction overall, they generate 92% higher comment rates than non-question posts. The value from this type of post, of course, is the insight gleaned when mining fan comments. Using question posts for market analysis can be an easy way to gauge opinion without needing to invest in a survey or focus group. When asking a question, ask it in the end.

Now that brands including CSOs have almost universally adopted Facebook marketing in some form, there is a critical need for clear Facebook posting guidelines to optimize fan interaction.

Use these best practices as a foundation to guide your Facebook posting strategy, measure the success of your posts once the best practices have been used, then tweak your strategy to optimize posts based on what works for your unique fan base.

- » Post on days that are best for your industry. Schedule posts to take advantage of times when interaction is high and other brands are posting less, such as weekends;
- » Post between 8 PM and 7 AM to present fans with content when they are not busy;
- » Post one or two times per day, but space posts out to avoid exceeding seven posts per week;
- » Keep it short: use 80 characters or less per post;
- » Use photo attachments or text-only status updates to increase interaction;
- » Show users a long URL on posts including a link, but track link clicks internally with a shortened URL;
- » Use questions to drive dialogue in the form of fan comments;
- » Place your questions at the end of posts for higher comment rates;
- » Use “caption this” and “fill in the blank” strategies to drive more comments;
- » Use emoticons to non-verbally communicate with your fans and humanize your brand;
- » Use calls to action to explicitly tell fans how you want them to interact with your posts; and
- » Use “softer sell” keywords, which resonate better with users.

3.0 CASE STUDY SESSIONS

3.1 Case Study 1: The West Africa Democracy Radio Project- The Newsroom is a Social Media itself (Adam Thomas)

Session Objective: *This session was an avenue for the presenter to share the experience of his organisation, Sourcefabric; one of the largest European open source projects for news and media, in the work they do and its relation to social media. Sourcefabric is dedicated to enabling quality journalism through open source software and services. The session was thus an experience sharing platform through which participants were made to understand how Sourcefabric enables media houses in 12 countries to incorporate new media technologies within their communications platforms with the aim of reaching out to a wider audience.*

Sharing on the West Africa Democracy Radio Project, one of Sourcefabric's key achievements in SSA, the presentation was built on a premise that a newsroom is a social network. With the experience of working with several media houses in different countries and continents, there has been a growing understanding that these media houses form a social network. In this vein, news is social media. News needs to engage everyone, it needs to be interactive, it needs to be local and international, it needs

to involve people and be mobile, it needs to be instant yet verifiable, and, it needs to be profitable.

The West Africa Democracy Radio (WADR) Project:

WADR is trans-territorial radio broadcasting via frequency modulation, satellite and online to twelve countries in West Africa. WADR has correspondents in ten countries and collaborates with over thirty partner stations in eight countries in the West African region.


The relationship between Source Fabric and WADR enabled the latter to overcome some of its challenges which included the following;

- » Lack of adequate technical skills to go open source;
- » Weak reliability and poor accessibility of website;
- » Inaccessible audio archives. The previous website could hold only three audio files at a time. Thus, many audio files were saved on hard drives and were not made accessible to listeners;
- » Weak social engagement of journalists;
- » Lack of shared understanding on how to manage online content; and
- » Limited resources to cover the whole region.

Understanding these challenges and with the technical ability to add value to WADR, Sourcefabric enabled WADR to;

- » Develop good quality audio files that are accessible,
- » Go social,
- » Be intuitive,
- » Stand out as a reliable media body in West Africa, and
- » To reach out to the diaspora.





WADR staff members were equipped with skills to develop and manage audio tracks online which are accessible on all communication gadgets – computers, phones, Ipads, etc. WADR now has a flexible web publishing platform that maximises its unique geo-location and multi-linguality. It now has a powerful media archive with a robust soundcloud upload and management features and facilities. WADR benefits from a wide range social sharing on its online platform for audio files, making the platform very interactive and engaging.

The existence of these innovative features and facilities enabled WADR to benefit from a 500% visit to its site a week after the organisation's new website was launched in April 2011 and WADR now boasts of 80,000 soundcloud followers and counting. In 2011, WADR won the Knight-Batten Award for Innovations in journalism.

How to be a Social news organisation: Learning from the challenges and success of WADR, and the added value of Sourcefabric, it is recommended that organisations who want to gain a wide a credible social presence should;

- » **Prioritise going social:** Organisations should place social media at the heart of their vision;
- » **Go open source:** which offers the flexibility to integrate with new social media;
- » Consider the **medium as the message:** Organisations should shape their social media strategy to their audience;
- » **Act local, think global:** Organisations should think about and explore opportunities that would enable them to open up to worldwide audiences with local content; and
- » **Remain credible:** Organisations should not attempt to change their identity. Organisations should stay as experts in their field every day.

Discussions:

A participant sought to know how Application Programming Interface (API) facilitates accessibility of soundcloud to other open source platforms. The presenter stressed that from a technical point of view, API a fantastic tool which is highly recommended. API is software that allows for a smooth communication between two soft wares. Most online platforms like Facebook, Twitter, etc, easily communicate with each other because their API's are incredibly well written. Soundcloud also has a well written API which enables it to effectively communicate with other online and social media platforms.

A concern was raised about the relevance of Soundcloud to online users in SSA given the accessibility and low bandwidth challenges encountered by online users in Low bandwidth countries. The presenter explained that Soundcloud allows for the upload of files for low bandwidth users. Users can upload a good number of files

and it is cheap for audio hosting. WADR uses the optimum package of 500USD per year for audio streaming.

3.2 Case Study 2: Using the Blog to report on Charles Taylor Trial (Ibrahim Tommy, Center for Accountability and Rule of Law)

Session Objective: *This session provided an avenue for participants to understand how a blog platform has been used to inform citizens on a particular issue. This sought to give participants an opportunity to envision how they could make their blogs to serve as relevant and vibrant advocacy platforms in West Africa.*

CARL hosts a blog on the Institute's website which serves as an avenue to raise awareness on issues pertaining to justice and rule of law in Sierra Leone. With the advent of the Charles Taylor trial at the Hague, the organisations resorted to a unique approach of informing and educating its audience through its blogging platform.

Brief background of the Trial: Taylor was tried not because of his role in the Liberia conflict, but because of his support to the rebels in Sierra Leone. Taylor was charged with eleven counts of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and the violation of international human rights laws during his involvement in the war in Sierra Leone. The trial commenced in 2006 and Taylor was finally convicted after he was found guilty of aiding rebels and the eleven counts charged against him. Taylor appealed the court's ruling based on the credibility of evidence used against him.

The blog was set up to report on the proceedings of the trial. It focused on providing first-hand, objective and credible information on developments at the court. This was done to help enhance the credibility of the process as lawyers relied on information provided on the blog to rethink their strategies. It was a useful for local and international researchers and experts on international criminal justice based on its focus to monitor court proceedings during the trial.

Although this process enabled CARL to widen its outreach and create a niche for itself in this area, it encountered some challenges during the process. There was limited access to court documents particularly close session evidence and discussions. Limited funds contributed to a low number of reporters at The Hague. Poor internet

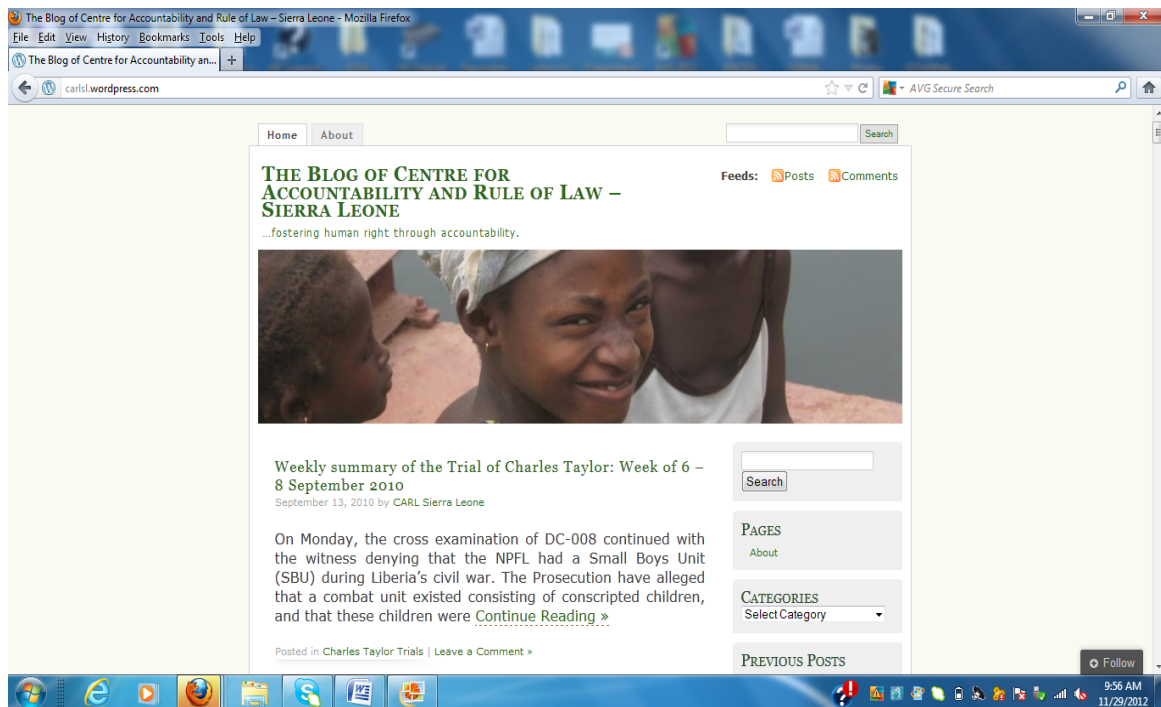


Image 4: Frontpage of CARL's blog page reporting the Charles Taylor trial (Source: Ibrahim Tommy, November 2012)

connectivity hindered timely sharing of information. To enable local audiences to have access to the information, community outreach programmes were organised to educate Sierra Leoneans on the proceedings at The Hague.

Discussions:

A prominent issue raised during the discussions emphasised on how CARL was able to realise this project given the poor internet connectivity challenges. Participants also sought to know how CARL shared their findings and reports with communities without access to the internet. In response, the presenter explained that they collaborated with traditional media outlets to share their findings with Sierra Leoneans. This also gave them an opportunity to interact with their audience and clarify pertinent issues and concerns of their audience.

In a follow up question, a participant sought to know if CARL was able to determine the impact the blog had on the media. The presenter explained that although no research was carried out to determine how many users accessed their blog to seek information on the trial, the feedback they got in terms of questions, panel discussions, site visit by researchers and legal practitioners was quite impressive and demonstrated the interest the blog had generated and its relevance to their society.

3.3 Case Study 3: Blogging Ghana: Ghana Decides Projects (Kwabena Boateng)

Session Objective: This session was programmed to enable participants to have an understanding of how new media technologies and platforms can be utilised to engage citizens in political discourse within a given context.

The Ghana Decides project mainly, focused on using social media to raise citizen's awareness and engagement on issues relating to the Ghana presidential and parliamentary elections in 2012. Three reasons account for the choice of social media as the relevant tool to achieve this. These include;

- » The change in communication trend which is moving from traditional media to social media;
- » The fact that Social Media is interactive; and
- » Internet penetration in Ghana has increased to 10% (2011) up from 5% (2010), indicative of a 100% Growth.

The Ghana Decides project made use of social media platforms such as Google plus, Pinterest, Vimeo, Youtube,

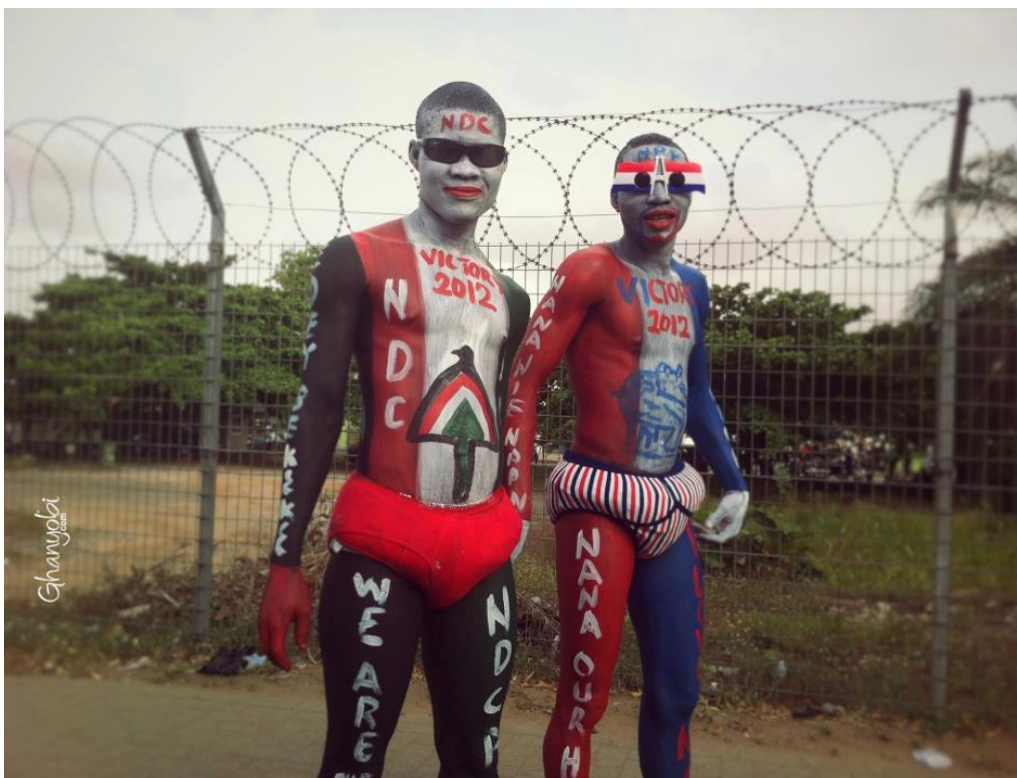


Image 5: Mascots of two main contending political parties, the NDC and the NPP, during the campaign period (Source: Kwabena Boateng, November 2012)

Flickr, Facebook, Google Hangout, Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram and Wordpress. It was initiated to achieve the following;

- » A more informed and engaged voting public; a more transparent election process; and timely reporting and resolutions of conflict;
- » An encouraged and empowered Ghanaian population and youths in particular to critically discuss elections and development issues that are important to them;
- » Increased use of social media tools by civil society organizations;
- » Increased coverage of elections-related issues and discussions on social media;
- » Increased access to 2012 Elections-related information to Ghanaians who are online and use social media;
- » Increased voter registration / Voter turnout; and
- » Increased Ghanaian participation in 2012 election activities.

Ensuring voice and accountability: The project sought to promote the voice of Ghanaians and followers of the Ghanaian 2012 elections process through social media platforms. This was attainable by means of the following strategy.

- » A consistent engagement with “offline groups” to get their stories online;
- » The identification of a niche for the project. Offline communities served as the target groups and online communities were the target audience;
- » Interactive and issue-driven engagements with GESI (Gender Equality and Social Inclusion) groups and broadcasting these engagements and issues on social media platforms;
- » Amplification of youth voices within Ghana’s political space through online/offline campaigns : the initiation and use of #GhanaDecides Tag, #SpeakGhana, iRegistered, social media campaigns, and collaborating with celebrities;
- » Training of physically challenged, women and youth groups on social media and how to use online platforms for their work especially advocacy;
- » Active online coverage of events and activities by CSOs especially those working on governance and inclusion issues;
- » Generating online discussions and debates (e.g Google Hangout discussion on women participation and representation in Ghana’s political space); and
- » Facilitating access to presidential and parliamentary candidates and Women leaders in the Ghanaian Society (e.g Google Hangout with Dr. Abu Sakara

- CPP Presidential candidate, Women + Politics).

The challenges encountered in executing this project include the following;

- » The relative low awareness of the existence of social media tools and their usage;
- » Attitude of Ghanaians towards political debates and discourse. Ghanaians take more interest in argue about politics without reflecting on and seeking to address policy issues;
- » Getting Buy-in from traditional institutions;
- » Lack of easy access to politicians;
- » Low traditional media coverage;
- » Low staff capacity to engage all project activities;
- » Monitoring and evaluation requirements of Funders;
- » Learning curve /bureaucracy during training; and
- » Low internet penetration.

Despite these challenges, Blogging Ghana was able to achieve the following during the implementation of the project;

- » Social Media training for 200 NGOs, CSOs, Students, community groups, political parties and individuals
- » Successful social media campaigns some of which include #iregistered, #Speak Ghana, #GhanaDecides;
- » Comprehensive coverage of election issues and live coverage of political debates, rallies and manifesto launches – making the elections social with the help of partners Pen Plus Bytes (PPB), Google, MyJoyonline.com, etc;
- » Getting Ghanaian's to actively discuss elections issues on and off line; and
- » Significant local and international media attention, notably featuring on Mashable, Economist, Forbes, etc.

3.4 Case Study 4: Social Media Reporting of Sierra Leone 2012 Elections (Simon Eyam Tsike-Sossah)

Session Objective: The goal of the session was to provide participants to have an understanding of how social media could be used to effectively report the elections process.

The social media reporting (SMR) project was carried out in Sierra Leone. It was a unique project through which activities that led to the elections in Sierra Leone were monitored and reported online and real time using Facebook. This monitoring and reporting process continued during and after the elections process in the country. The SMR project created a space for political parties and independent political candidates to report (on election day), discuss, and also report on the processes that violated or strengthened electoral codes using social media in the lead up to election day. SMR was implemented in an effort to deepen the electoral process using new media technologies, mainly Facebook.

SMR was developed and implemented to;

Make citizens part of the electoral process, particularly during the last leg of that process;

Make citizens police the integrity of the process from a distance (using pictures, text and other soft social media tools); and

Engage vulnerable groups of people that are easily abused by political parties (usually the youth) to cultivate a culture of political tolerance.

The project employed the following activities;

- » Observation of more than 10 political rallies;
- » Recording of short videos that highlighted security concerns;
- » Undertook a two week trip around Sierra Leone and into Liberia to observe at first hand;
- » Visit to "trouble" or hot spots – Kailahun, Kono, Kenema and the border town of Jendema; and
- » Conducted interviews with over 20 key stakeholders including regional/district/Local Unit Police heads, Political Parties, NEC, etc.

The choice of Facebook as a suitable platform for electoral process monitoring and reporting was based on the premise that it enjoys the most popularity in Sierra Leone the target group included youths between the ages of 18 and 30 years.

Findings made from the SMR project culminated in the following:

- » That generally, the elections were well organised given the circumstances;
- » Raised awareness on the potential existence of gross irregularities on elections day and after elections and provided an indicative notification on the possible existence of the under listed inconsistencies;
- » Electricity challenges were wide spread across the country;



Image 6: Cross-section of the Facebook page of SMR (Source: Simon Eyrum Tsike-Sossah, November 2012)

- » Communication challenges outside big cities and major towns across the country;
- » Party agents were not well prepared;
- » Susceptibility of NEC staff to be compromised;
- » Human Rights violation were perpetrated by security and allied agencies under the guise of ensuring peace and security during the process; and

International Observers who were present to observe the elections were restricted to "Big Cities"

3.5 Case Study 5: Social Media and the Occupy Nigeria Demonstration (Yemi Adamolekun)

Session Objective: This session specifically aimed at creating a forum for participants to understand how social media could be used to effectively drive policy issues. This sought to create a framework for participants to share their perspectives on the relevant contextual strategies CSOs could consider when engaging in an online advocacy campaign.

The Occupy Nigeria campaign was centred on the quest by Nigerians, led by civil society groups, to influence the government of Nigeria reinstate the fuel subsidy it had removed from fuel prices at the dawn of 2012. The removal of the fuel subsidy was seen as an opportunity to galvanise large scale fraud by state officials. This was also used as a platform to raise awareness and the struggle to fight corruption in Nigeria.



To engage Nigerians and strategically position the issue as well as drive mass action to promote inclusive advocacy on the issue, promoters of the campaign resorted to new media tools as a potent vehicle to convey the message across and win favourable action. Thus, Facebook, Youtube and Twitter were some of the prominent social media platforms that were utilised during this campaign.

These social media platforms were used as advocacy platforms to

- » Share dates and locations of protests;
- » Share security alerts;
- » Share videos;

- » Share pictures;
- » Share information – facts and figures, Flyers downloaded outside Lagos and reprinted; and
- » Share humour.

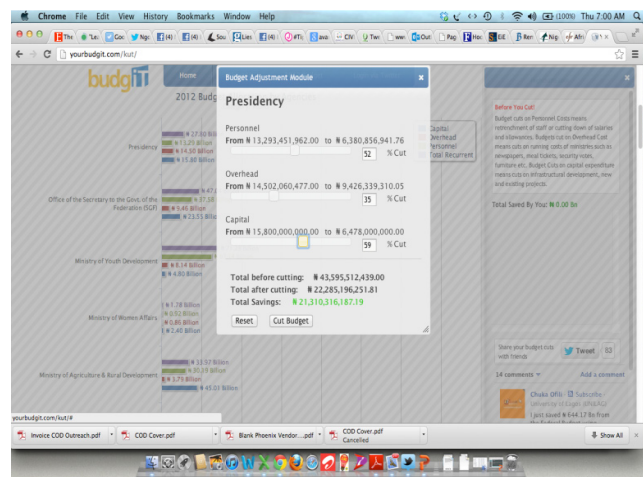
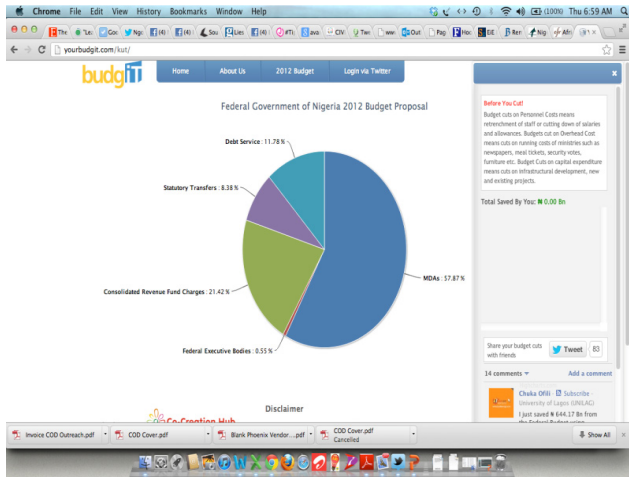


Image 7: Sharing information on facebook during Occupy Nigeria campaign (Source: Yemi Ademolekun, November 2012)

Adding to the new media face of the campaign, advocates engaged with Nigerian artists to promote the campaign. Nigerian celebrities and pop artist attract enormous attention, hence their involvement in the campaign to amplify the voices and drive the campaign forward. Videos of celebrities advocating for the reinstating of the fuel subsidy and the fight against corruption were developed and shared via social media portals. These efforts were of added value to the interest generated in the campaign as they increased the number of campaigners and actors adding their voices online and on the ground to support the goals of the campaign.



40 EXPERIENCE SHARING SESSION:

Blogging for Social Activism

Session Objective: *This was a fully interactive session that brought together four prominent West African bloggers to share their career experience as bloggers. They shared their underlying reasons for the creation and management of their respective blogs, the issues they discuss or seek to address in society and how they engage with their followers.*

4.1 Aisha Dabo:

Aisha Dabo works for a news agency, APA based in Dakar, Senegal. She initiated her blog in 2008 with the view of sharing her experience while travelling across Africa. She has deep African roots that inspire her writings. She was born in Sierra Leone and she grew up between Gambia, Senegal and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The angle of articles featured on the blog changed with time from personal travel experiences to experiences lived during the elections in Senegal and The Gambia with the latter having most of the posts. Her writings address issues related to human rights, freedom of expression, women and children's rights, with a special interest in female genital mutilation.

In writing about the Gambia, she shares her opinions on major issues of human rights abuse. She also tweets the major issues and raises debates on the issues. Gambian journalists are afraid to address core issues of human rights abuse. She seizes this opportunity to develop first-hand information which is then disseminated across the country. Her major breakthrough was a tweet and blogging on the execution of 12 human rights activists in 2012. This led to a major sensitization which she initiated using her blog and twitter account. This galvanized advocacy campaigns in the form of public marches in The Gambia. This led to the creation of over 10 Facebook pages across the globe to encourage Gambians to protest for the resignation of the Gambian president.

Her advocacy approach has faced criticisms from persons who do not share her views. To this she responds by sharing her views with the critics who may or may not buy into her ideas.

Despite the massive online campaigns, there is a stiff control of advocacy actions in the Gambia. It is therefore challenging to match online activism with on-ground activism which prevents the swift achievement of results.

4.2 N'Depo Akaffou Euphrem:

N'Depo Akaffou Euphrem is an Agronomist by training and has worked as an agricultural practitioner for years. His inspiration is drawn from this professional orientation. He took part in a Web 2.0 training in March 2011 which equipped him with hands-on skills to develop and manage online tools. He was motivated to develop a site through which he can express his views and share his agricultural experiences. He then developed a web platform – <http://euphyagrifood.blogspot.com/>; a blogging platform through which he shares his views on issues pertaining to agricultural policies, knowledge on agriculture and agricultural technologies, etc.

Having been an active blogger he has learned some lessons which include;

- » The necessity for training to be effective on online activism
- » Increase of knowledge and understanding on issues. His engagements have engaged over 10,000 interested followers although the numbers are few relative to followers of social sites that discuss entertainment issues;
- » There are no barriers with online activism. The message is transmitted beyond borders. His site has followers from USA, UK, Cameroon, Nigeria, etc;
- » There is need for structure and organisation in online engagement. There is need for a strategy and an engagement plan to maintain consistency; and
- » Readers show interest in articles that empower them with knowledge and skills to process raw materials into useful products.

As a way forward, he recommended that there is need to mobilise bloggers to be united and work as one force. There is a need to form a network that would help to amplify the different messages disseminated by bloggers.

4.3 Mac- Jordan Degadjor:

Mac-Jordan Degadjor stated that he believes that social Activism is in active existence in Ghana. He was inspired to engage in blogging through racial discrimination he experienced while studying in Ukraine. He therefore saw the opportunity to share his experience and advocate for anti-racism by sharing the instances of mal-treatment he encountered as a foreign student. He used this platform to share practical evidence of how he was marginalized, which could serve as evidence to support the work of anti-racism activists.

Given the wide attention his blog attracted, the platform was technically attacked and disconnected from the online space, an evidence of the attacks he faced. He stressed on the fact that his blog articles were inspired by his passion to promote social justice. He emphasized on the need for bloggers to regularly share their views to keep the attention and interest of their followers. He encouraged bloggers to use simple, clear and interactive language to promote engagement.

He added his voice to the relevance of blogs in promoting advocacy.

4.4 Emile Bela Kouakou:

Emile Bela Kouakou started blogging as passion and now runs two blogging platforms. His passion was driven to engage his audience on critical issues that affect the Ivorian society. This was informed by an experience during the conflict in Cote d'Ivoire on April 5, 2011. While hiding from armed fighters in his quiet home in Cote d'Ivoire, a stray bullet whizzed pass him. At that moment, he missed death and thought it wise to make an impact on his society because as he put it, 'if that bullet had killed me, I would have left no legacy in my country'.

His first blog was based on developmental issues (agriculture and development, aid effectiveness, gender and development, international cooperation and development among others) hosted by the French Agency for Development. He started with four (4) visitors and currently has over two thousand visitors (2000) and over four thousand (4000) pages read a month.

He stated that his second blog which focuses more on political issues was started in September 2012. He wrote an article addressing the problem of corruption in Ghana, focusing on the Woyome corruption scandal in the country. This article was among competing articles for a completion organized by Radio France International (RFI) and is currently among the finalists.

Kouakou spoke about how he engages his followers by making sure that his messages do not bore his audience, but rather keeps them interested and engaged. He spoke on the fact that blogging has helped him make friends and all around the world and also experienced both the positive and negative side of blogging.



5.0 CONCLUSION

The 2-day social media experts' meeting was enlightening, educative and set the pace for active online engagement by activists. Participants shared their experiences and expertise promoting a significant amount of regional and international learning. The experts delivered practical ideas and suggestions that will help strengthen the use of social media within civil society in the region. At the end of the meeting, the experts expressed satisfaction with the high level of deliberations, inputs and consultations.

It was unanimously agreed that the experts present would constitute a Social Media Experts Group which will guide and advise the design and delivery of the Institute's social media training initiatives. WACSI also committed to commissioning a research on how civil society is utilising social media in Africa. The Institute also committed to developing a training toolkit and strategy template to strengthen the new media competencies of practitioners and CSOs.

Appendix 1: Programme Agenda

Wednesday 28 November 2012

08:00	Departure from Hotel (MJ Grand, East Legon)
08:30-09:00	Registration
09:00-09:30	Welcome and Opening of the meeting Nana Afadzinu, WACSI Executive Director
09:30-09:35	Presentation of the programme (Jimm Chick Fomunjong, WACSI)
09:35-10:00	Participants' introduction
Session 1 Moderator:	Nana Afadzinu
10:00-10:30	Social Media: Prospects and Challenges (Adaora Ijeoma Asala (Spectra)
10:30-11:00	Discussions
11:00-11:15	Tea/ Coffee Break
11:15-11:45	Strengthening civil society and fostering development through google online platforms (Estelle Akofio-Sowah)
11:45-12:15	Discussions
Session 2	Moderator: Samson Itodo
12:15-12:45	Communicating civil society values and achievements using social media (Anne Mazimhaka)
12:45-13:15	Discussions
13:15-14:15	Lunch
14:15-14:45	Influencing effective policy change through digital activism (Joshua Japheth Omojuwa)
14:45-15:15	Discussions
15:15-15:30	Tea/Coffee Break
15:30-16:00	Strengthening Brand Recognition through Social Media (Zawadi Nyongo)
16:00-16:30	Discussions
16:30-16:45	Group photograph
16:45	Departure to Hotel

Thursday 29 November, 2012

08:00-08:30	Departure from Hotel
08:30 -09:00	Registration of participants
Session 3	Moderator: Peter Kahler
09:00-10:00	Case Study 1: The West Africa Democracy Radio Project (Adam Thomas, Sourcefabric) Case Study 2: Using the Blog to report the Charles Taylor Trial(Ibrahim Tommy, Center for Accountability and Rule of Law)
10:00-10:30	Discussions
10:30-10:45	Tea/Coffee Break
10:45-11:45	Case Study 3: Blogging Ghana: Ghana Decides Projects Case Study 4: Social Media Reporting of Sierra Leone 2012 Elections (Simon Eyram Tsike-Sossah) Case Study 5: Social Media and the Occupy Nigeria demonstration(Yemi Adamolekun)
11:45 - 12:30	Discussions
12:30-01:30	Lunch Break
Session 4:	Moderator: Emmanuel Dogbevi
01:30-02:00	Strategic communication using facebook » Citi FM Ghana (Evans Effah) » Uncut & Media Pop (Kwabena Poku & Omar Farouk)

02:00-02:30	Discussions
02:30-03:30	Blogging for Social Activism
	» Aisha Dabo
	» N'Depo Akaffou Euphrem
	» Mac-Jordan Degajor
	» Bela Kouakou
03:30-04:00	Discussions
04:00-04:30	The Way Forward: Effective use of social media by civil society organisations (Nana Asantewa Afadzinu)
04:30-04:40	Closing Remarks
	End of Meeting
	Departure to Hotel

Appendix 2: List of Participants

S/n	NAME	COUNTRY	CONTACT DETAILS
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